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Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 1004

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PROP IZ
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BAKR SENDS HARDLINE MESSAGE TO IRAQI JOURNALISTS ADMIDST REPORTS THAT U.S.-IRAQI RELATIONS UNDER POSITIVE CONSIDERATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 984

1. ON OCCASION OF 108TH ANNIVERSAY OF THE BIRTH OF THE IRAQI PRESS, PRESIDENT BAKR HAS ADDRESSED A MESSAGE TO JOURNALISTS, CALLING ON THEM TO UNDERTAKE THE DEFENSE OF USURPED ARAB RIGHTS IN PALESTINE AND IN OTHER AREAS OCCUPIED BY THE ZIONISTS AND THEIR AMERICAN IMPERIALIST ALLIES IN COLLABORATION WITH REACTIONARY FORCES OF APOSTASY AND DEFEATISM. THE MESSAGE IS THE MAIN STORY IN ALL BAGHDAD DAILIES OF JUNE 15. FOR THOSE WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH BAGHDAD CODE WORDS, FOLLOWING MAY BE HELPFUL: REACTION EQUALS ARAB KINGS AND PRINCES; APOSTASY EQUALS THE SYRIAN REGIME; DEFEATISM REFERS TO MODERATE PALESTINIAN LEADERS AND EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT.

2. IRAQI JOURNALISTS SCARCELY NEED URGING TO FOLLOW THE LINE ENUNCIATED BY BAKR. A USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCE WITH CLOSE LINKS TO IRAQI INTELLIGENCE CLAIMS THAT BAKR SPEECH WAS WRITTEN BY THE CENTRAL INFORMATION BUREAU
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OF THE NATIONAL COMMAND. HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THIS ORGAN, WHICH LAYS DOWN OFFICIAL POLICY TO BE FOLLOWED BY IRAQI MEDIA, HAS AMONG ITS MEMBERS INFORMATION MINISTER TAREQ AZIZ AND OTHER IRAQI PROTEGES OF BAKR'S DEPUTY, SADDAM HUSSEIN. THAT MEDIA DOES NOT SEEM TO REFLECT WHAT IS GENERALLY THOUGHT TO BE HUSSEIN'S MORE PRAGMATIC POLICY IS EXPLAINED BY HUSSEIN'S CONSCIOUS DOUBLE STANDARD AS

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OUTLINED IN RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKLET (IN ARABIC) EXTITLED "IS FLEXIBILITY IN REVOLUTIONARY ACTION A MEANS FOR PROGRESS OR A ROAD TO BACKSLIDING?" IN ONE REVEALING PASSAGE, HUSSEIN MAKES CLEAR THAT EXPEDIENCY IS A PRIVILEGE FOR THE TOP LEADERSHIP ONLY AND THAT OTHER RANKS OF THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT MUST HEW TO A PURE REVOLUTIONARY PATH TO GUARD AGAINST THE MASSES LOSING THEIR FERVOR FOR THE GOALS OF THE BAATH. BY EXTENSION, THE MEDIA IS TO KEEP MAKING THE FAMILIAR ATTACKS ON THE REAL OR IMAGINED ENEMIES OF ARABISM WHILE THE TOP LEADERSHIP EXPLORES WAYS TO IMPROVE STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS WITH THOSE SAME VILLAIMS.

3. IS THIS REALLY HAPPENING? OUR SOURCE CLAIMS TO HAVE SEEN A WORKING PAPER ON U.S.-IRAQI RELATIONS WHICH IS NOW PENDING BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMAND COUNCIL. THE PAPER WAS DEVELOPED IN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF THE RCC. IT HAS BEEN CIRCULATED, FOR COMMENTS TO OTHER RCC BUREAUS, THE NATIONAL COMMAND, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, AND IRAQI EMBASSIES IN KEY ARAB CAPITALS. THE PAPER POSES OPTIONS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT IRAQ WILL EVENTUALLY RESUME RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. (SADDAM HUSSEIN HAS DESCRIBED THE PRESENT SITUATION AS ABNORMAL). THE QUESTION IS WHEN--NOW, NEAR FUTURE OR LATER. THE CONSENSUS OF COMMENTS SUPPORTS RESUMPTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND PRESIDENT BAKR'S CHIEF OF PROTOCOL (A CAREER DIPLOMAT) EVEN BELIEVES HE HAS THE PRESIDENT'S NOD FOR EVENTUAL NOMINATION AS AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON.
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4. COMMENT: SCENARIO OF PUBLIC HARDLINE AND PRIVATE PRAGMATISM HAS RECENT HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT IN IRAQ. SUALIHUSSEIN'S CELEBRATED PUBLIC EMBRACE WITH THE SHAH AT ALGIERS IN 1975, HERALDING THE STILL HEALTHY IRAQI-IRANIAN DETENTE, WAS PRECEDED ON THE MORNING OF THE VERY SAME DAY BY BLISTERING MEDIA ATTACKS ON IRAN AND THE SHAH PERSONALLY. IT WOULD BE FALSE OPTIMISM TO EXPECT SUCH A DRAMATIC TURNABOUT IN U.S.-IRAQI RELATIONS. WE MUST NOT, NONETHELESS, ALLOW THE STRIDENT PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE U.S. AND ITS FRIENDS IN THE AREA TO DROWN OUT THE MORE PRAGMATIC MESSAGES WHICH WE MAY RECEIVE THROUGH PRIVATE CHANNELS. MEANWHILE, THE REPORT OF A WORKING PAPER PENDING BEFORE THE RCC WOULD SEEM TO SUPPORT MY RECOMMENDATION IN REFTEL TO ALLOW THE IRAQI DECISION-MAKING PROCESS TO PRCEED AT ITS OWN PACE.
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